

GENERATING IDEAS AND ENABLING ACTION:

Addressing the Housing Crisis
Confronting Ontario Adults with
Developmental Disabilities

ONTARIO DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
HOUSING TASK FORCE
FINAL REPORT 2018

EXECUTIVE EXCERPTS



PREFACE

The Ontario Developmental Services Housing Task Force has the honour to present here its final report: *Generating Ideas and Enabling Action: Addressing the Housing Crisis Confronting Ontario Adults with Developmental Disabilities*.

There is a housing crisis confronting Ontarians with developmental disabilities — and it is a crisis that has been growing steadily more serious for at least twenty years. For many citizens whose families are unaffected by the challenges connected with developmental disabilities, the housing crisis is often invisible. Too often, however, housing challenges can bring pain and consequences that profoundly limit the joys and opportunities that should be available to all in a province as blessed as ours.

This report urges dramatic action. It is time to move with energy and determination to challenge and overcome the severe difficulties that have been so long endured. Given awareness, innovation, and commitment, the Housing Task Force also believes that a record of crisis can be turned into a legacy of success — one that can be a source of pride for future generations of Ontarians.

The word "crisis" is exactly appropriate to describe the housing challenges outlined in this report. Statistics alone are deeply disturbing and grow exponentially with each passing year.

For example:

- In 2013, the wait list¹ indicated that 12,000 adults with developmental disabilities were waiting for residential services.
- By 2017, the number had climbed to 15,700.

These raw numbers, bad as they are, actually need to be multiplied to fully understand their impact. Parents, siblings, extended families, and networks of support are challenged by having to shoulder total responsibility for providing housing supports on their own. Indeed, the numbers should be multiplied yet again because these housing challenges are hidden for decades while families provide often

unacknowledged and uncounted care and support for loved ones at home — decades beyond the time most Ontarians experience the famous "empty nest" phenomenon.

In recent years, several studies and reports have elaborated on the statistics and awareness of what they mean to our fellow citizens. Progressive Conservatives joined Liberal and New Democratic Party members in launching a Parliamentary Select Committee in 2014 to investigate the disturbing range of problems experienced by citizens with developmental disabilities. All

¹ "Service registry" is current provincial government terminology for what many in the broader community refer to and experience as the "wait list" for housing. This report will use the term "wait list" for clarity in its reference to this circumstance.

three parties then endorsed an ambitious set of recommendations designed to address the issues that were identified, acknowledging the severe shortfall in housing supports. Among the proposals, that Select Committee urged the elimination of wait lists within 12 months. To cite another example of widely available information on the problems being addressed here, in 2016, the Ontario Ombudsman's Office released *Nowhere to Turn*, a report detailing the large number of severely troubling cases, in which Ontario families and individuals had been left in prolonged crisis situations because of the lack of appropriate residential opportunities.

There is, then, no shortage of statistics confirming the housing crisis and yet, here we are, confronting not just a long-standing predicament that has remained static, but one that actually grows more troubling each year. More people are waiting — and waiting longer than ever — for housing opportunities that will allow them to live more independent lives in their communities. There are also more parents and siblings waiting for the supports that will allow them to leave behind the nightmares that haunt them, as they worry about a safe and secure future for an adult child, sister, or brother who needs a home and support.

Generating Ideas and Enabling Action is the Housing Task Force's response to this crisis. The report presents recommendations based on four years of study and

deliberation, informed by wide-ranging consultations, demonstration projects, and almost countless years of collective lived experience among the Task Force's members. We emphatically believe that implementation of the recommendations will help to generate a desperately needed legacy of success. If implemented, we can begin a new and happier chapter in the history of the housing crisis confronting adults with developmental disabilities.

The recommendations in this report also emerge from a strong Housing Task Force consensus regarding core principles and guidelines. Because these principles have served as a particularly important foundation for our recommendations, they deserve highlighting in advance:

- We believe emphatically in the need for action. There are many words in this report — as has been the case with many other studies over the years — but the Housing Task Force was also determined to use demonstration projects and other efforts to begin building quickly as investigation and learning proceeded.
- Government should continue this pattern,
- We believe that innovation should be a priority concern. This was an important part of the Housing Task Force's original mandate, and our four years of experience have only made us more aware of the abundant creative energies that exist across the province. Those energies need to be enabled, in order to more effectively deal with the housing crisis.
- We believe that person-directed and person-centered approaches need to be a constant feature of planning and action. Ontarians with developmental disabilities must have their rights as citizens fully respected as we move forward.

- We believe in the importance of strong sensitivity to diversity and equity. There should be clear awareness of the widely differing needs and wishes of people with developmental disabilities, and this recognition should prompt the design of wide-ranging options for individual support. The overall diversity of Ontario also requires special awareness. Cities, towns, and rural areas; multiple social, ethnic, and faith communities; the unique challenges of the North; and other elements of the province's complexity should influence a search for flexibility and variety in program and action design.

- We believe in the promise of partnerships and the possibilities that emerge from strengthening relationships and commitment to shared purpose. The housing crisis confronting Ontarians with developmental disabilities cannot rest solely on the shoulders of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. The resources, energy, and creativity of other provincial government departments, other levels of government, individuals and families, agencies delivering services at the grassroots level, and the private sector can and should play vital roles in producing the legacy of success that is so desperately needed. This has been shown in microcosm through the demonstration projects that have emerged from the work of the Housing Task Force, and the lessons learned about the benefits of partnership hold major potential for moving forward.

The members of the Housing Task Force look forward to opportunities to discuss our experiences and recommendations with the government and with the wider community that is so deeply concerned about this crisis. There are no quick solutions to the housing crisis confronting Ontario adults with developmental disabilities, which means that ongoing commitment and engagement will be needed by all of us.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Pruessen, Chair

Ontario Developmental Services Housing Task Force

Lynda Kahn, Vice-Chair

Ontario Developmental Services Housing Task Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Developmental Services Housing Task Force (HTF) concludes its four years of effort with this final report: *Generating Ideas/Enabling Action: Addressing the Housing Crisis Confronting Ontario Adults with Developmental Disabilities*

Tasked with exploring innovative ideas for dealing with the steadily worsening housing problems confronting an especially vulnerable sector of the population, the HTF used wide-ranging consultations and research to design thirteen key recommendations.

Eighteen demonstration projects highlighted both key principles and priorities and a wide range of new or expanded options for moving forward more effectively. An overview of the demonstration projects can be found at: [1.8 Innovative Housing Solutions](#).

The HTF concluded that a two-fold approach would have value for addressing the housing crisis for Ontario adults with developmental disabilities: On one hand, our explorations brought us great appreciation for the significance of ideas — for the production of what we have come to call an innovative "knowledge economy" for the developmental services sector. On the other hand, we never doubted that good ideas would require action if progress was to be made. Within both the "generating ideas" and "enabling action" sections of this report, the Housing Task Force has found it helpful to use a wide-angle lens perspective that emphasizes various categories of approach: "whole of government," "whole of society," and "the lived experiences of Individuals families and networks."

The HTF urges vigorous and sustained action on the following recommendations:

SECTION 1: GENERATING IDEAS

A. "WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT" APPROACHES: CROSS-MINISTERIAL COLLABORATION

Recommendation 1: Inter-ministerial Housing Task Force (IMHTF)

The Housing Task Force recommends formation of an Inter-ministerial Housing Task Force (IMHTF) charged with identifying and developing opportunities for "whole of government" initiatives. The IMHTF would both address and look beyond the current crisis, in order to develop transformative steps that would prevent the re-emergence of crisis situations in the future.

Recommendation 2: Inter-ministerial Policy Review

A wide-ranging policy research and review should be undertaken, led by the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services and supported by ministries with related and relevant concerns (e.g. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community Safety &

Correctional Services) and municipalities. The research would serve to identify current policy (and existing rules and directives) that may be limiting innovation as well as the most effective use of funding and supports.

B. "WHOLE OF SOCIETY" APPROACHES: ENGAGING ADVOCATES AND OTHER EXPERTS IN CONTINUAL RESEARCH CONSULTATION

Recommendation 3: "Housing and Housing Supports" Research & Consultation

Initiatives There should be an investment in the continual exploration and consultation of housing innovation specific to both the availability and creation of physical housing and the creative use of supports/funding. These initiatives would help set the stage for changes in the current crisis-based system of prioritization, moving towards providing greater choice and flexibility to people with developmental disabilities.

Recommendation 4: Cross-sector/Cross-regional Research Initiatives

The Housing Task Force recommends that the government engage in continual exploration and research to identify innovative developmental services initiatives and practices in other provinces, countries, communities and related sectors (e.g. mental health & addictions). The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, should lead this effort, in collaboration with ministries with related and relevant concerns (i.e. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance).

Recommendation 5: Research Initiatives Addressing 'Complex' Situations and Unsupported Individuals

The government should commit to undertaking specific exploration and research aimed at identifying issues/needs and solutions to address situations faced by people without personal networks of support, who have multiple, intersecting needs, or who are in 'complex' or precarious housing situations, including those facing homelessness.

Recommendation 6: Research Initiatives Focused on Technological Innovation

There should be further exploration and research focused on the identification of technology-based initiatives and advancements that could be utilized to address housing and residential support needs for people with developmental disabilities.

C. GATHERING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS FAMILIES NETWORKS: GRASSROOTS CONSULTATIONS KNOWLEDGE SHARING**Recommendation 7: Continuous Consultation Process**

The HTF recommends the implementation and maintenance of regular, meaningful grassroots consultation efforts with non-government stakeholders (individuals, families, family networks, self-advocacy groups and other grassroots community members) and service providers, including housing providers, healthcare providers, and other service groups within the broader community:

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- To advance common sense recommendations, and
- To identify opportunities for government action, and
- To tackle inconsistencies and barriers within current government programs.

These consultation efforts should include clearly stated outcome expectations and a schedule for annual reporting of people's experiences and future actions.

SECTION 11- ENABLING ACTION

A. "WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT" APPROACHES: PRIORITIZING INNOVATION & EMPHASIZING LOCALITY OF LIFE

Recommendation 8: Overall Funding for Housing Services and Supports

The Housing Task Force recommends adoption of an innovative two-track ten-year budget plan with appropriate funding to sustain and augment individualized housing supports for people with developmental disabilities in Ontario. The first track would address the long-neglected needs of Ontarians who have been on the wait list for housing supports for more than ten years; the second track would provide the policy and resource commitments needed to prevent the kind of expanding regional or provincial wait lists that generate crisis scenarios for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Recommendation 9: Provincial Housing Innovation Fund

Provincial government action should be taken to increase MCCSS funding for innovation-driven housing initiatives, including an ongoing innovation fund available to each region, and funding provided to enable action on ideas generated by the Inter-Ministerial Housing Task Force called for in Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 10: Affordable Housing Initiatives

A range of actions should be utilized expand affordable housing initiatives for adults with developmental disabilities, with emphasis on responding to opportunities identified by HTF research. Among other things, these actions would entail effective cooperation between MCCSS, MMAH, MOHLTC and local authorities (including service managers and municipal/regional councils),

B. "WHOLE OF SOCIETY" APPROACHES: SUPPORTING DIVERSE OPTIONS AND PERSON-CENTRED APPROACHES

Recommendation 11: Increasing Funding Flexibility and Supporting Individualized Funding

The HTF recommends actions to increase flexibility in utilization of Developmental Services funding, including the availability of individualized/direct funding for residential options, and encouraging the availability of a dedicated independent third-party resource to assist individuals and families in the development of an individualized, customized housing proposal/ plan for an innovative housing solution.

C. EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND NETWORKS: COMMUNICATION, SYSTEM REFORM & TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES

Recommendation 12: Community-Focused Communication Initiatives

The HTF recommends that MCCSS allocate funding and resources towards the implementation and ongoing maintenance of a central communications hub curated to include the most current information regarding funding and housing options including links to forms, updates, etc. This hub should be available and easily accessible to anyone with an interest in DS services and information,

Recommendation 13: Adjusting the Developmental Service Ontario (DSO)

Application and Support Process

The HTF recommends that the role of DSO with regard to supporting individuals in accessing appropriate housing be clarified across the province, in order to better identify appropriate and available housing options.

CONCLUSION

Implementation of the 13 recommendations in this Housing Task Force final report will address the severe housing problems confronting adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario. There are multiple tools and resources available to support innovative ideas and energized actions that are desperately needed for sustainable housing options to emerge and flourish. For example, the encouragement of partnerships, the fostering of consultation, and the expansion of individualized Funding will give citizens greater control over their lives, while also expanding overall capacity to resolve this worsening problem.

For too long, the approach to housing needs within Ontario's developmental services system has been crisis-driven and crisis-generating. It has locked people into long-term, lifelong dependency that is simultaneously very costly. Government resources and leadership will always be needed for vulnerable sectors of the population, but responsibilities can and should be shared more effectively and productively. The innovations proposed in this report will allow citizens and communities to play the more expansive roles they are able and anxious to take up, while allowing government to serve people with greater care and efficiency.